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CROWN ROAST OF LAMB SIMPLIFIED

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Swift on the heels of the Christmas and New Year holidays with their family gatherings come the more formal dinners and luncheons of the midwinter season. As the center for such a menu, what more decorative and delicious than a crown roast of lamb? To talk of crown roast simplified may seem a paradox - unthinkable as apple pie without apples. Assuredly a crown roast is full of frills and curves, like the new costume silhouette, and also a triumph of cutting and fitting. But the fact that the meat cutter has trimmed and shaped it so skillfully makes it easy to roast when the new scientific methods of meat cookery are used.

In some quarters the accepted idea has been that a crown roast would not keep its shape during cooking unless the center was filled with something round and hard, like a cup or a large onion, or with close-packed ground meat. Once it had served this purpose the ground meat was scraped out, discarded, and the hollow refilled with green peas or mashed potatoes before serving. The bare rib bones, which form the points of the "crown," were protected from charring by balls of dough, cubes of salt pork, and various other things equally fussy to put on and take off and not altogether satisfactory while in place.

Far more important was the effect on flavor and texture of the meat itself. The choice lean at the base of the ribs was either too dry or too moist, and the inner layer of fat, covered as it was by the filling, had no chance to develop a rich brown flavor. From the laboratories of the United

States Department of Agriculture comes a short, easy method for well-browned yet juicy crown roast with a savory mushroom stuffing.

Whatever the butcher may say, order the crown roast made without a ground-meat filling. Also, though he call it sheer folly, have the layer of fat that lines the inside trimmed down until it is only about a quarter of an inch thick but still covers the lean completely. More space is thus gained for stuffing, and the individual chops when served do not have an overthick rim of fat. A thin fat layer is enough to act as a self-baster and keep the lean from drying out. With rack, open pan and well-regulated oven, crown roast demands little more attention than a plain cut. First, rub the meat well with salt, pepper, and flour, and place on the rack in a shallow roasting pan. To keep the Frenched ends of the ribs from overbrowning, slip over them pieces of raw potato, as illustrated. Add no water and leave the pan uncovered. Begin the roasting in a very hot oven - 480°F.- and when the surface has seared and browned lightly at this high temperature for twenty to thirty minutes, reduce the oven quickly to moderate heat - 300° to 325°F. If need be open the oven door for a few minutes to bring down the temperature. Continue the roasting at this moderate even heat for sixty minutes longer, and occasionally spoon up the pan drippings over the lean meat/^{at}the base of the crown. About thirty minutes before the roast is done make the mushroom stuffing, using these ingredients:

1 pound fresh mushrooms	1/4 cup chopped onion
5 tablespoons butter	4 cups fine dry bread crumbs
1 cup chopped celery	1-1/4 teaspoons salt
1 cup chopped parsley	Dash of pepper

Cook the mushrooms in the butter in a heavy skillet for about five minutes, scoop them out and set aside, and in the remaining liquid cook the celery, parsley, and onion until the onion turns yellow. Stir in the bread crumbs, salt and pepper, add the mushrooms, and mix all the ingredients thoroughly. Set

the skilletful of stuffing in the oven to heat thoroughly. Lift the roast onto a hot platter, pile the hot mushroom stuffing into the center, replace the potato caps with paper frills, and serve at once with gravy made from the pan drippings.

In American menus pineapple seems to be an even more popular accompaniment than mint sauce or jelly. For those who want both, serve browned slices of pineapple on the platter with the roast and garnish with sprigs of fresh mint or let there be mint-flavored water ice or fruit punch.

